

### Snake River Alliance

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The Snake River Alliance is an Idaho-based grassroots group working for peace and justice, the end of nuclear weapons production activities, and responsible solutions to nuclear waste and contamination. We are proud of our nearly two decades of solid, responsible research, education, and community advocacy. The Bulletin is published six times a year.

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will raise BNFL's earnings to nearly \$1.2 billion. Adding to the sticker shock is the fact that the price tag for construction could be cut by a third if our own government, which produced the waste, financed the plant.

BNFL's primary technologies are crush and burn. A quarter of the waste will be burned; three-quarters will be crushed. Then it will all be encased in cement.

### The Alliance Position

The mixed waste plant should only be built if we know that the pile of waste we end up with will be safer than the pile of waste we started with after the risks of crushing and burning radioactive and hazardous wastes are added in. To learn the answer to that equation, the Alliance demanded an environmental impact statement on the mixed waste plant in August 1997. A year later, the DOE released its draft EIS...and avoided the question.

### The WIPP Trip

The DOE's only rationale for treating the INEEL waste that already poses less risk to Idaho is to get it ready to send to WIPP. But the State of New Mexico has not granted WIPP a permit to accept the mixed waste BNFL's plant would produce. Simultaneous with the release of the mixed waste plant draft EIS, the DOE admitted to a federal judge that that permit may be several years away. In other words, WIPP might (or might not)

get its hazardous waste permit after BNFL has built its Idaho plant.

Even if WIPP goes forward, some portion of the waste slated for crushing and burning would probably be acceptable there with simple repackaging. Some portion, too, would probably never meet WIPP's standards, whatever they end up to be. Setting aside how problematic the WIPP goal is, the DOE has not justified in its draft EIS crushing and burning *all* the waste. Reducing the waste volume through crushing and burning doesn't even make the WIPP Trip cheaper.

### Back Home

We have to assume that after crushing and burning waste to the tune of \$1 billion, the pile of waste we end up with will still be Idaho's pile. Will it be safer? According to the draft EIS, not particularly.

Crushing might reduce the volume of the waste by 80%. But it does not reduce its chemical or radioactive hazards and so does not make it safer. However, by packing plutonium atoms closer together, it might add the danger of an uncontrolled criticality, or nuclear chain reaction, which is not discussed in the draft EIS.

BNFL wants to burn 22% of the waste, but the draft EIS doesn't demonstrate why it picked that percentage. The Environmental Protection Agency calls incineration the Best Available Control Technology for PCBs. But estimates in the draft EIS of the

amount of PCB-contaminated waste range from 26 cubic meters to 14,222 cubic meters, a stunningly wide margin of error for the folks in charge of plutonium. The draft EIS's contradictory waste estimates fall far short of a justification, or even an explanation, of the need for a new incinerator at INEEL.

The Pit 9 failure did nothing to engender confidence in the DOE's ability to meet the cleanup challenge. The next project at INEEL *must* be done right every step of the way. So far, the draft EIS on the mixed waste plant sets forth a project with little environmental justification. The DOE should issue a new *draft* EIS. If this is a project worth supporting, show us why.

The National Environmental Policy Act requires that the Department of Energy seek public comment on its plans to burn and crush mixed waste at INEEL. Under the law, the DOE must respond to your concerns.

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Deadline for written comments:  
September 26, 1998

For more information,  
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